

Ethics Institute Newsletter

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Upcoming Films in the Ethics Series

All films are scheduled to begin at 6pm.

- Monday, Nov. 16, "Whose Life Is It Anyway?"
- Monday, January 25, "Trade"
- Monday, Feb. 15, "Crash"
- Monday, Mar, 15, "Glengarry Glen Ross"
- Monday, Apr. 19, "Dr. Doolittle 2"

Ethics and the Media: Dr. Sheri Bleam

This month's Institute for Ethics Brown Bag features Dr. Sheri Bleam speaking about applied ethics in the field of Communications. This is the second in our "applied ethics" series. The series is designed to showcase Adrian College faculty members who have long integrated ethical discourse into existing classes.

On Thursday, February 25, Dr. Bleam will introduce us to ethics and the media in her presentation "Casuistry Comes Home to Roost."

These two sessions are a preview of next year's series which will focus on Ethics in the Professions and in Academia." They are open to the public.

Dr. Bleam's presentation on Communication Ethics is an inclusive exploration of case based reasoning (casuistry). Examples from the COMM Arts subfields of Public Relations (a question of media relations and organ-

izational priorities in Haiti), Media Arts (the issue of video support in online academic journals), and Journalism (placement of public journalism in traditional reporting) are offered along-side suggestions for further study.

In continuing the emphasis on Applied Ethics introduced by Profs. Bachman and Bleam, the Institute will provide online resources periodically.

The first is to the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University (Ca). The Markkula Center focuses on Bioethics, Business Ethics, Government Ethics, as well as several other areas. The url for the center is <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/>.

This also is an highly rated applied ethics program at Bowling Green State University. You will be hearing more about this later.

There are two remaining Brown Bags for this academic



Dr. Sheri Bleam
Professor, Department of
Communication Arts and Sciences

year. On Thursday, March 18, the College Chaplain Rev. Dr. Chris Momany will speak about the Asa Mahan's "perfectionism," which featured a method of social reform. On Thursday, April 22, are invited to take a break from classes and exam preparation to hear Dr. Melissa Stewart give an overview of "Environmental Ethics."

Ethics Film Series: "Crash", Monday, February 15, 6pm



The next Institute for Ethics film series presentation is Monday, February 15, at 6:00 in Knight

Auditorium in Valade Hall.

The film deals with race and cultural clashes among diverse characters. Leading the post film discussion are Dr. Scott Elliott (Philosophy/Religion) and Ms Idali Feliciano (Multicultural Center).

The R-rated film does contain graphic sexual scenes and

some brief nudity. This is more than balanced by the important issues of race relations and cultural clashes,

The remaining films in the series are:

* **March 15**, "Glengarry Glen Ross" (James Spence and Bill Bachman)

Brown Bag Schedule:

- Sept. 24, Dr. James Spence
- Oct. 22, Dr. Tony Coumoundouros
- Nov. 5, Prof. Nathan Goetting*
- Dec. 1, Dr. Fritz Detwiler
- Jan. 28, Prof. Bill Bachman
- **Feb. 25, Dr. Sheri Bleam**
- Mar. 18, Rev. Dr. Chris Momany
- Apr. 22, Dr. Melissa Stewart

Times and Location:

- Knight Auditorium, Valade Hall
- 12:10—12:45. Twenty-minute presentations. Fifteen minute Q&A.

"His is happy whose circum-stances suit his temper but he is more excellent who can suit his temper to any circumstances."

— David Hume

Ethics Film Series cont.

* **April 19**, "Dr. Doolittle 2" (Melissa Stewart and Janet Salzwedel)

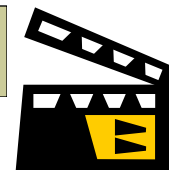
Due to copyright issues, the film series is open only to the Adrian College community.

Please contact Dr. Scott Elliott at selliot@adrian.edu if you would like a formal part in the discussion.

The Institute for Ethics welcomes ideas for films from other campus groups. The films must directly deal with an ethical issue / problem / dilemma facing the contemporary world.

Suggestions for next year's Film series are particularly welcomed. All films will be

followed by an open discussion.



For faculty and staff who would like to lead a discussion on a suggested film, the Institute for Ethics does provide an honorarium. This would be a great opportunity to show a film relevant to a class you are teaching which includes ethical situations.

An Opportunity for Faculty

The Adrian College Institute of Ethics is launching a new curriculum development opportunity for those of faculty who want to begin infusing ethical discourse into your departmental courses.

This initiative is not intended to be an "add-on" to already full course curricula and syllabi. Rather, the goal is to integrate ethical reflection of already existing course materials.

Beginning now, the Institute for Ethics offers consultation to individual faculty member and / or departments through Fritz Detwiler, Jim Spence, and Tony Coumoundouros.

We want you to contribute to

the development of ethical discourse across the campus and in the disciplines by helping you build an approach and focus that is appropriate for your needs. We are not going to "tell you what to do," we will help you think through what you want to do.

Consultation services may include, but are not limited to, consultation about ethical theories and their application to a given discipline, developing models by which to analyze ethical questions specific to a discipline or topic, developing case studies for use in the classroom, assisting in the creation of a section of a course focused specifically on ethics, advising on the syllabus, recommending relevant

readings, and creating a document with background information on ethical analysis in the specific subject.

Faculty who choose to integrate ethical reflection into their courses using the institutes services will receive a stipend of \$100 through the Institute.

Faculty members who do accomplish integration will be given the opportunity to present their methods and results to the College through an Ethics Brown Bag presentation next academic year. This also carries a stipend.

A similar initiative for staff at Adrian College will be launched in the near future.

Steps for Thinking about Ethical Reflection in the Classroom

These steps are a good place to begin thinking about the ethical dimensions of courses.

1. Recognize that there is an event or problem to react to.
2. Define the event as having an ethical dimension and formulate the problem.
3. Figure out what abstract ethical rule(s) [theories] might apply to the problem.
4. Decide how abstract ethical [theories] actually apply to the problem, in order to suggest a concrete solution
5. Formulate and ethical solution at the same time possibly preparing to counteract [address] contextual forces that might [prevent or obstruct and ethical investigation or plan of action.

A Profile in Ethics: David Hume

Thomas Hobbes' attempts to develop a new science of politics and morals spurred a century of debate about human psychology and the nature of morality. Joseph Butler (1692 - 1752) and Francis Hutcheson both attempted to refute psychological egoism and many have found these arguments decisive. These attempts to refute Hobbes were not premised upon moral disagreement. Instead, they called into question Hobbes' purportedly empirical starting point, asking whether a disinterested enquiry into human nature would conclude that human beings are driven only by self interested concerns. While it is possible to interpret every action through the lens of self interest, they denied that these are always the best explanation of our actions. Pre-theoretically, empirical observation seems to suggest that human motivation is a complicated matter which includes benevolent and altruistic motives.

David Hume (1711 -1776) pulled together these lines of thinking in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Hume, a Scottish philosopher, hoped to Hume provide an entirely empirical understanding of morality an entirely empirical basis. He seems to agree with Hobbes that 'good' and 'bad' should be understand as analogous to 'warm' and 'cold' insofar as they are not properties to be found in the world but are a function of how we perceive that world. He also agrees with Hobbes that our understanding of morality requires an accurate account of human psychology, and that justice is best understood as a useful set of conventions. For this reason Hume was sometimes believed to be offering nothing more than skeptical arguments in support of a Hobbesian theory. These skeptical arguments alone would have earned him an important place in the history of philosophy, but he also provided a more sophisticated analysis of human psychology than Hobbes, as well as powerful arguments for his account of justice.

Hume argued that human beings are both self interested and benevolent. We also possess a mechanism for communicating and sharing sentiments which Hume calls sympathy. It is the

sympathetic transmission of pain, for example, that causes us to cringe instinctively when we witness violence to another person. For Hume, sympathy rather than reason is the "chief source of moral distinctions." Moral judgments are made from the perspective of an impartial observer: When one person causes pleasure or pain to another, the observer also experiences pleasure or pain as a result of our natural sympathetic tendencies. We then approve or disapprove of the motives causing the agent to behave in this way. Those motives we tend to approve, we call virtues. Those we tend to



disapprove of, we call vices. He sums his theory up nicely in one brief paragraph: Take any action allowed to be vicious: Willful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colors, heat and cold, which, according to

modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.

Our natural sympathy and compassion, then, form the basis of morality. But our compassion is limited by our self interest, and when resources are limited there will be conflict which requires something more than compassion and sympathy for its resolution. For this reason we invent rules of justice which determine rights, property lines, and notions of fairness and desert. Hume is explicit about this, stating that "justice is a moral virtue, merely because it has that tendency to the good of mankind; and, indeed, is nothing but an artificial invention to that purpose." It would be senseless, he argues, to argue over something like property rights if the world provided more than enough for our needs. "For what purpose make a partition of goods, where every one has already more than enough? Why give rise to property, where there cannot possibly be any injury? Why call this object mine, when, upon the seizing of it by another, I need but stretch out my hand to possess myself of what is equally valuable? Justice, in that case, being totally USELESS, would be an idle ceremonial, and could never possibly have place in the catalogue of virtues."

Hume's arguments have been profoundly influential. There have been many attempts to refute him and at least as many new theories developed from his basic ideas. Both Hume's friend Adam Smith, who wrote *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*, and Jeremy Bentham, who developed an elaborate account of utilitarianism, were heavily influenced by Hume's thought.

Thanks to Dr. James Spence for this commentary.

In the next two issues we will consider Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, key representatives of utilitarianism or consequentialism.

"The sweetest and most inoffensive path of life leads through the avenues of science and learning; and whoever can either remove any obstruction in this way, or open up any new prospect, ought, so far, to be esteemed a benefactor to mankind."

—David Hume